DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 291 952 CE 049 840

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TITLE Baggage Barriers. Techniques.
PUB DATE Jan 88
NOTE 3p.
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052) -- Journal Articles (080)
JOURNAL CIT Lifelong Learning; v11 n4 p29-30 Jan 1988

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adult Development; Adult Education; *Adult Learning; *Adult Students; Aging (Individuals); Cognitive Style; Educational Gerontology; Experience; Individual Characteristics; Postsecondary Education; Student Attitudes; *Student Characteristics; *Teacher Student Relationship; Teaching Methods

ABSTRACT

When adult learners come to the learning program, they bring the individual "baggage" that they carry around--such as home problems, time constraints, employment problems, and positive or negative feelings about self. The baggage of an adult's life contains all that adults are, have been, and hope to be, as well as all that life means to them. Seven components that make up the nature of adults include: (1) age, experience, and self-concepts; (2) physical nature and aging developments; (3) philosophy and values; (4) emotions and memories; (5) motivation, attitudes, and interests; (6) culture, history, and preferences; and (7) intellectual abilities and perceptions. (Teacher hints and techniques to overcome problems that may arise because of baggage barriers are offered for each of these components.) (KC)

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TECHNíQUES

Baggage Barriers

By Mary Jane Even

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When adult learners come to the learning program, they bring with them individual "baggage" which they carry around. For some, this load is very heavy—for example, a sick child, no money, no job—and for others, the load is lighter—for example, freedom of time, feeling good about self, a lighter heart and spirit. As they come into the classroom, they bring that baggage, set it down on the table, and hide behind it. The baggage represents who they are, what they are, why they have come to this place, where they have been, and all the life experiences they have gathered until that moment. It is their personal armament and support. I have developed a name for these individual concerns entilted "Baggage Barriers."

The baggage of an adult's life contains all that the adult is, has been, and hopes to be, as well as all that life means to them. It contains history, culture, values, attitudes, finances, philosophy, religion, hopes, dreams, sex, self concept, physical attributes, abilities, skills, knowledge, education, beliefs, and life experiences. It contains all that life and living have produced for that person.

More specifically, it contains those aspects of the nature of all adults and the unique ways each adult has dealt with life. I have summarized these Baggage Barriers into seven components which I perceive make up the nature of adults. Though they have been summarized, each component has multiple dimensions.

Baggage Barriers-Uniques in Adult Learning

1. Age, experiences, and self-concepts.
2. Physical nature and aging developments.
3. Philosophy and values.
4. Emotions and memories.
5. Motivation, attitudes, and interests.
6. Culture, history, and preferences.
7. Intellectual abilities and perceptions.

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Adult learners sit in front of the teacher who, in his or her mind's eye, can envision the individual baggage and the personal needs of each person. What makes a teacher believe that he or she can teach each of them and all of them? What is the basis upon which teaching in a classroom with many students takes place? Is there hope?

There is hope because we now have an understanding of what takes place when an adult learns and why each learns differently. Even though each person learns differently, we have found ways to break through the barriers to learning held by each person. We now have the knowledge to be more effective teachers of adults even though all adults learn in different ways.

As a follow-up of my article, "Why Adults Learn In Different Ways," which appeared in Vol. 10, No. 8 of *Lifelong Learning*, this brief synthesis of "Baggage Barriers" identifies Teacher Hints and Techniques to overcome problems which may arise because of Baggage Barriers.

In order to meet needs of all learners, recognize and appreciate individual differences. Teaching is a process of facilitating the learning process via multiple techniques and interactions. There is only one "best" way to learn how to teach adults effectively.: PRACTICE. **AAACE**

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BAGGAGE BARRIERS-HINTS AND TECHNIQUES FOR TEACHERS

1. Age, Experience and Self-Concepts

- Recognize that age groups have different approaches to learning. Be practical for 20's; use application to self for 30's; use discussion for 40's; ask opinions of student in 50's.
- Recognize that the aging process may enhance or limit adult learning.
- Recognize that all ages can learn. Olders, e.g. 35, may be slower if not continuing to learn.
- Remember that, due to experience, adults want 55% control over the classroom.
- Be sensitive to the fact that perceptions are based on former experiences, styles, and dominant concerns.
- Relate examples to dominant concerns by age and life experiences to make them relevant and meaningful.
- Permit students to make choices on what is learned and how.
- Provide feedback differently to each age group, e.g., never tell as 50's that the paper could be better and give an "A." This is a contradiction. You can be more straightforward with 20's, but cautious with 30's and 40's as well.
- Though grades may not be given, many olders want some indication of level of achievement.

2. Physical Nature and Aging Developments

- Recognize physiologically the interplay of blood flow, adrenal glands, and brain fluid create a slow down in cognitive functioning; therefore, timed tests bias against adults who are ill-prepared.
- Keep in mind that right brain dominant learners may not like to read and will need more time for explanation and conferences.
- Produce a climate which frees the adult learner by providing for breaks, parking, refreshments.
- Don't try to force "practical ideas" integration. It is a natural state in adults, but recognize they may need ideas about how to integrate theory.
- Recognize the possibility that left brain people will have a hard time using "andragogy." They want specifics and teacher direction.
- Be ready to explain ideas at least three different ways.

3. Philosophy and Values

- Begin by responding philosophically, by intent, strategy, and style, to the needs of each adult.
- Believe that your instruction is a process for learning, not just a content-input system.
- Recognize that your philosophy may blend with only one third of any class group.
- If you believe in cognitive field learning theory, you can use andragogy techniques most appropriately.
- The role of the teacher is to facilitate learning rather than impose learning.
- Know that students have values which they can not, or do not, wish to change. Work with these, not against them.

4. Emotion and Memories

- Emotions are part of learning. Remember that change in adult learner ideas may inhibit learning because it may bring up many emotions.
- Recognize most learners are fearful of new content and change.
- Remember that most adults are afraid when they are given assignments—not of the work, but of the time to do it. Sometimes life concerns limit responses.
- Recognize that emotions and former memories are to be dealt with, not dismissed.

5. Motivation, Attitudes, and Interests

- Remember that predispositions to listen—give attention—is related to how specifically content relates to each person.
- Know each person via a personal profile and conference.
- Be able to use their "labels," jobs, and interests to talk about why information is important to listen to and read.
- To gain attention, state ideas first in application terms and then begin with theory. Never state a theory first.
- Be aware that motivation is needed to participate, hear, perceive, respond, show interest, take notes, ask questions. Never assume motivation during any phase of instruction.
- Use variable techniques during each class to help all, at some point, become more interested.

6. Culture, History, and Preferences

- Help the students to recognize you are a learner also.
- Try to separate old, uncomfortable ideas of learning with new ways.
- Carefully select words which do not bias equity, culture or demean personal interests.
- Never ask a person to criticize a cultural value—theirs or others.
- Know the time when a person lived in order to use proper examples and relate to experience.

7. Intellectual Abilities and Perceptions

- Remember that concepts must be related to old ideas in order to be learned.
- Recognize fluid intelligence has forestalled crystallized intelligence.
- Remain aware that there are at least 20 different impressions of what you say held by any group.
- Never assume anything about knowledge and ability. Check it out.
- Recognize levels of students. Talk differently to each group.
- Remember that the student's level of problem-solving and reflectivity determines how well the content is learned.
- Stay cognizant that the level of learning the teacher seeks has a relationship to the development of learning—facts or problem-solving.
- Recognize not all adults think like you or believe as you do. Allow for student restructuring of content.